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ABSTRACT

The author states that hundreds of schools throughout the country are discovering that a positive factor for academic achievement is parental involvement. Schools are finding out that parents "do care" and that, given the opportunity, they can influence and further enchance the educational opportunities of their children. Some question facing the schools are, "How do we begin to draw parents closer to the schools?," "What types of programs can we use with parents?," and "What are some of the new roles concerning education that parents can play?" The author tries to answer some of these questions by referring to the parental involvement component of the bilingual program at the Education Service Center, Region XIII, Austin, Texas. (SK)

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PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN BILINGUAL EDUCATION

Paper presented by Irene Fernandez, Education Service Center, Region XIII, Austin, Texas to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language preconvention workshop, Boston, Massachusetts, November 19, 1973.

Hundreds of schools all over the country are discovering that a positive factor for academic achievement is Parental Involvement. Schools are finding out that parents "do care" and that given the opportunity, they can influence and further enhance the educational opportunities of their children.

Some questions facing the schools are "How do we begin to draw parents closer to the schools?", "What types of programs can we use with parents?", "What are some of the new roles concerning education that parents can play?".

This morning I will try to answer some of these questions by referring to the Parental Involvement component of the Bilingual Program at the Education Service Center, Region XIII, Austin, Texas.

The Bilingual Program has been in operation for four and one half years in two schools in Austin and one in Lockhart which is thirty miles from Austin. The major goals of the Parental Involvement component are: (1) to develop rapport among parents, school personnel and community persons; (2) to expand parental knowledge and interest about their children's education; (3) to increase parental awareness of the importance and implications of supplementary educational activities, and (4) to involve parents in school related activities.

What do we mean when we say "Parental Involvement"? Parental Involvement is a process of community action that enriches the total educational program. Through interaction between the home, school and community, parents learn how they can best support, influence and contribute to their children's educational development.

In our program, we have used informal and formal activities to bring parents closer to the schools. These activities have provided parents with opportunities to become acquainted with the project staff and with one another. They have also contributed to a sharing of ideas, interests and viewpoints and have expanded parents' knowledge of cultural, educational and recreational activities accessible to everyone.

At the beginning of each school year, parents are brought together to discuss the bilingual program through orientation meetings, general meetings and grade level or unit meetings.

The orientation meetings for all parents are conducted at the schools participating in the bilingual program in August.

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To ensure parental attendance, the meetings are held in the evening. Besides personal contact through homevisits, parents receive information about the meetings by notices sent with the children, by mail, telephone communication and articles in the newspaper and church bulletins. All written communication disseminated to the parents is in both Spanish and English.

The orientation agenda, conducted in Spanish and English covers the following:

I. Introduction of staff (principal, teachers and Title VII project staff)

II. Presentation of rationale for Bilingual Program, e.g. Education Service Center, Region XIII Bilingual Program slide presentation

III. Explanation of the role parents will play in the program

A. Parent Advisory Board
B. Parent Education

1. Home Reading Program
2. Toy Lending Library
3. Games Library
4. Tutor Training Program
5. Workshops
6. Field trips for parents only

C. Parent Participation

1. Sign-in sheets
2. Guidelines for classroom observation
3. Classroom participation
4. Parent-Teacher Conferences

A similar agenda is used at the initial general meeting held in one of the homes for parents unable to attend the orientation meeting. The subsequent general meetings are usually conducted a week after parent advisory boards have met so that all parents have an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the board's decisions concerning some phase of the Bilingual Program.

The teachers and principals preside at the grade level or unit meetings where they present to the parents the rational for bilingual education, the individualized curriculum, the room organization, the reporting systems and the roles parents will play during the school year.

Another method used to ensure mutual understanding, better communication and cooperation between the home and school is the home visit. The visit not only provides us with an insight into the home conditions which influence the child, but it gives the parents an additional opportunity to learn about the school program and the activities in which they can participate.

Although home visits are conducted throughout the year as the need arises, an assistant and I visit with all the parents of children enrolled in the Bilingual Program during the first two or three months of the school year. At this time we discuss the benefits their children will gain from the program, ways in which parents can assist in school related activities, the purpose of the parent room if one is available in the community and the educational programs available to them.

Parents are also invited or scheduled to visit in the classrooms for observation purposes beginning in October. The classroom observation gives parents an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the kinds of things that take place in the classroom.

Parents who plan to visit the classrooms receive a letter explaining their purpose for observing, an explanation of the observation instrument they are to use, and a parent-teacher conference form, all of which are in Spanish and English.

Most parents recognize the importance of language, reading and math skills but many do not have the necessary background to help reinforce their children's learning. Therefore a large portion of the parental involvement component is devoted to parent education. Some of the programs used in the Parent Education Program have been developed throughout the country while others were developed as needed.

Teaching reading at home has been a controversial issue for many years. Many educators feel that this is the business of the school and is therefore "off-limits" to parents. However, there are those who feel that parents are just as qualified as professionally trained individuals to teach reading. Dr. Dolores Durkin in her study "Children Who Read Early" found that early readers were about one year ahead of those who learned to read later. She also points out that parents of early readers worked with their children at home while those of late readers felt that reading should be left up to the schools.

Dorothy Rich in Reading: Success for Children Begins at Home, states that the staff at the Home and School Institute, Washington, D.C. have taught reading successfully at home to children who wanted to read, but were thought to be too young by the schools.

In an attempt to help parents become aware of the reading process and how they can instill the importance of this process in their children, the Parental Involvement Component has developed a Home Reading Program which is geared towards the first grade reading level student.

Participation in the Home Reading Program is on a voluntary basis. Parents receive information about the program at the orientation meeting held at the beginning of the year and through personal contact.

After the personal contact is made, a list of participating parents and children is compiled and a session for the parents is held. During the session, parents are provided with additional information about reading, a listing of recommended reference materials, and an indepth review of the goals of the Home Reading Program

Parents are taught to use a booklet containing general instructions, follow-up suggestions and some extra reading activities. The booklet contains monthly calendars which facilitate the parent's accounting of the days they have worked with their child.

Weekly telephone calls and home visits are made to encourage parents to continue working with their children.

Monthly workshops are also provide parents with an opportunity to share their experiences with other parents and to learn new ways of working with their children.

The Parent/Child Toy Lending Library, which was developed by the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development, is an eight week course for parents of pre-school children.

The program objectives as stated by the developers are:

- -to enhance parent/child relationships
- -to train parents to help their children develop intellectual skills
- -to stimulate parents to take an active part in the education of their own children.

Parents who participate in the course are provided with a Parent Guide which gives specific instructions on the use of each toy. At each session they learn to work with one toy by viewing a filmstrip, listening to a tape and role playing. The session also allow time for parental discussion of problems relating to education. Parents then borrow the toy and use it at home with his child.

The eight toys used in the course to teach different concepts and language development are as follows:

1. Sound Cans for auditory discrimation
2. Color Lotto for color matching, color naming and problem solving.
3. Feely Bag for tactile discrimination
4. Stacking Squares for problem solving
5. Wooden Table Blocks for relational concepts
6. Number Puzzles for numerical concepts and counting
7. Bead-O-Graph for visual discrimination and motor coordination
8. Flannel Board and Shapes for shape-size-color discrimination.

The Games Library is a program for parents who are interested

in using various educational materials in the home which will compliment the classroom instruction.

At least eight games are demonstrated by me at each of the monthly meetings which are held at the school or in one of the homes. After the demonstration the teachers, teacher aides and I assist parents in selecting materials appropriate for their children

At the following meeting, parents return the materials and discuss the ways the games were used with the children. They share successes as well as problems that may have arisen.

Some of the materials in both Spanish and English which are made available to the parents on loan basis are: math games, phonics games, puzzles, books, filmstrips, records and tapes.

During the past two years, in an effort to provide additional help for the teachers in the classrooms, parents have volunteered their time to work as reading tutors.

Training sessions have been conducted using the tutor training materials prepared by the National Reading Center, Washington, D.C., through a grant from the U.S. Office of Education, Department of Health, Education and Welfare. The purpose of the tutoring program is to provide a trained tutor for each child who needs to improve his reading skills.

The tutors participate in 16 to 20 hours of intensive training, in discussions and in simulation activities on a variety of subjects ranging from the role of the tutor to questioning techniques. Sessions are also devoted to learning how to administer interest inventories and informal reading inventories.

During the last 10 hours of the training sessions, the tutors practice using the seven teaching strategies developed by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory in Austin, Texas, with children in preparation for their work within the classroom.

Upon completion of the training program, tutors work under the direction and supervision of a primary grade teacher.

Other activities which meet the interests of the parents and further enhance their self-development have also been conducted. Parents who are interested in furthering their education have been provided with basic adult education classes or have been referred to an existing program within the school system. Information on career development and job opportunities has been made available to them. Child development, parent-children arts and crafts workshops and educational material-making workshops have also been held.

Where can most of the activities mentioned be conducted? Anywhere, but the ideal place is a "parent room". This year we have such a room at two schools which was acquired after the parents requested it. This room which is of a social-meeting-working nature is divided into six centers: the Games Library and Toy Lending Library Centers, a Material Making Center, a Craft Center, a Sewing

Center and a children's area.

The Games Library and the Toy Lending Library Centers contain the materials previouly mentioned. The material making center has all the necessary items used in constructing materials for the classrooms. Parents also make materials that they can use at home with the children. The craft center has a collection of booklets containing many craft ideas that are easily made. A craft workshop is usually held once a month or every two months where parents make items such as candles, Christmas decorations, ojos de dios and paper flowers. The sewing center is equipped with a sewing machine which parents use to make clothes for their own children and costumes for school programs. The children"s area contains toys and games that pre-school children use while parents are working.

I have tried to share with you some of the things that have been successful for me in working with parents in our Bilingual Program. I hope that this information will be of some use to those of you working with parents

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